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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SOFIA 001902

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [KCRM](#) [IZ](#) [BU](#)

SUBJECT: BULGARIA: PRESIDENT SIGNALS A MEK DECISION IS CLOSE

REF: A. 04 SOFIA 0196

[1](#)B. KOLEV-ABIZAID LETTER 01 NOV 05

[1](#)C. SOFIA 1882

Classified By: Ambassador John Beyrle, for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a November 8 meeting with the Ambassador, President Parvanov mirrored the General Staff's forward-leaning position on Bulgaria's follow-on activities in Iraq, indicating the government is now leaning toward the MEK mission at Camp Ashraf. He also expressed his optimism for a positive outcome on bilateral base negotiations and emphasized the importance of Bulgaria's fight against organized crime following the murder of prominent businessman Emil Kyulev. The President reiterated a previous request (ref A) for U.S. help in obtaining information on allegations that Parvanov's Bulgarian Socialist Party benefited from corrupt oil deals with the government of Saddam Hussein. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (C) On Iraq, President Parvanov echoed the recent letter of General Staff Chief Kolev (ref B), referring to a Bulgarian follow-on mission at Camp Ashraf as if it were already a firm decision. In a follow up discussion with the DCM, Deputy Foreign Minister Kyuchokov said the MFA and MOD will be sending a joint recommendation in favor of the MEK to the Council of Ministers. They hope to have their final proposal ready for deliberation at the Council's Nov. 17 meeting. Both Kyuchokov and Parvanov indicated the proposed force size would be 100-120 troops. Kyuchokov said the government is preparing for a negative public reaction to the decision, but hopes to mute this by emphasizing the humanitarian nature of the MEK mission and the reduced force size. The Ambassador thanked Parvanov for Bulgaria's continued engagement with the USG throughout the planned withdrawal of their current battalion.

[1](#)3. (C) Parvanov also remained optimistic on the issue of joint basing negotiations, indicating that he expected all political forces in the country except one (a reference to the extreme nationalist party "Ataka") to ultimately support an agreement on U.S. forces in Bulgaria. Ambassador Beyrle stressed the importance of reclaiming the basing issue from Ataka and highlighted Prime Minister Stanishev's recent positive statements on basing as an example of Bulgarian politicians shaping public opinion on the issue.

[1](#)4. (C) The President thanked the Ambassador for U.S. offers to assist in the murder investigation of banker Emil Kyulev (ref C). He emphasized the GOB's seriousness on this issue and his satisfaction at international and inter-ministerial cooperation on the investigation. The Ambassador restated the U.S.'s willingness to help, but also expressed concern at the investigation's slow pace and failure to collect basic pieces of evidence in a timely fashion. He reminded President Parvanov that -- despite the GOB's request for technical experts -- no evidence has yet been seized that would require the presence of these experts in Bulgaria. The Ambassador noted that Bulgaria may again be losing an opportunity to demonstrate its seriousness in the fight against organized crime.

[1](#)5. (C) Further to the theme of national security, President Parvanov emphasized the threat of radical nationalism in Bulgaria as one that "we should not underestimate." The President mentioned the success of the recently launched "Ataka" newspaper, which he claimed had reached a circulation of 40,000 in a matter of weeks, and raised concerns about Ataka's financial backers.

[1](#)6. (SBU) The President expressed great appreciation for the hospitality shown by President Bush and the First Lady during his recent White House visit. Parvanov reserved special praise for the "meaningful, forceful, and clear" statements by President Bush on the Bulgarian nurses in Libya, and noted that the U.S. position had been welcomed by the Bulgarian public.

[1](#)7. (C) President Parvanov closed the meeting by repeating a "special request" previously made in 2004 (ref A). In light of the "Petrogate" scandal, Parvanov asked for U.S. help in obtaining information regarding ongoing allegations that his Bulgarian Socialist Party had profited from "oil for influence" deals with the Saddam Hussein regime. Parvanov categorically denied that the BSP had received "a cent" from Saddam. He emphasized that this request was not for public

use, but merely for party leaders "to know for ourselves what this is about."

18. (C) COMMENT: President Parvanov,s White House visit has been extremely successful in ensuring Bulgaria,s continuing cooperation on a number of high-profile issues. The Government is clearly moving toward the MEK mission, although concern remains about public reaction. We will continue to track the government's discussion, encouraging a positive decision and developing a public diplomacy strategy that minimizes negative public response. END COMMENT
BEYRLE